

NIGHT GALLERY

2276 E. 16th Street, Los Angeles, California 90021

nightgallery.ca

VANESSA MALTESE

How long is a piece of string?

December 1, 2018 – January 19, 2019

Night Gallery is pleased to present *How long is a piece of string?*, an exhibition of new work by the Toronto-based artist Vanessa Maltese. This is her first solo presentation in Los Angeles.

Maltese's exhibition features two separate series of kinetic works that explore the eye's reflexive desire for coherence even where there is none. Drawing upon processes of pattern recognition and optical illusion, each set of works present images destabilized by the viewers' ability to manipulate them.

In one series, paintings of bold geometric patterns feature steel frames dotted with magnets of different shapes and sizes which the viewer is invited to reconfigure around the image or move to another work altogether. Repositioning the magnets in this way fundamentally alters the balance of Maltese's graphic compositions, commenting on the arbitrary nature of abstraction and challenging the viewer's instinct to appreciate an artist's arrangements as final and correct. The images themselves push decorative painting nearly to the point of absurdism: her works employ techniques of *trompe l'oeil* which suggest depth through fictive shadows and folds, though these flourishes are placed within works that bear no possible resemblance to real space. Meanwhile, the few recognizable motifs that do appear in Maltese's work are disrupted, flattened, and repeated nearly to the point of pure ornamentation. The series' most explanatory piece, "Remote associations," 2018, includes several Rorschach tests fanned accordion-style across the composition. These psychological tests ask subjects to look at abstract ink blots and discern familiar associations within them. Maltese's work calls for a similar process of recognition only to halt it mid-search, leading the viewer back to the most immediate level of perception, untethered to the impulse to understand.

The other series, "The reader is only satisfied if they feel like a fool," features works on steel-coated enamel. These works take their inspiration from a set of vintage collectible game-cards in which a minimalist cartoon is left incomplete, one line of its familiar shape replaced by a dangling chain affixed to the surface which the viewer (or player) may contort into a variety of positions. The image is thus brought continuously toward and away from its referent, leaving the viewer to negotiate the cartoon's ever-shifting relationship to the concrete.

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Like the question that gives the exhibition its title, Maltese's works exist as unsolvable puzzles, offering playful experiments whose only resolution occurs in their perpetual state of flux. The works are testaments to the sublime trickery of visual representation and the brain's compulsive attempts to organize the world into meaning.

Support for this exhibition was provided by the Ontario Arts Council, an agency of the Government of Ontario, Canada.

Vanessa Maltese (b. Toronto, ON, 1988) received her B.F.A. from OCAD University, Toronto. She has had solo exhibitions at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York; COOPER COLE, Toronto; Halsey Mckay, East Hampton, NY; In the Pines, Jackson, WY; and Erin Stump Projects, Toronto. She has also appeared in group exhibitions at Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago; Carl Louie, London; Greenpoint Terminal Gallery, Brooklyn; and the Art Museum at the University of Toronto. She is the recipient of numerous grants for emerging artists, including those provided by the Ontario Arts Council, the Toronto Arts Council, and the Canada Council for the Arts. Her work has been reviewed in *Frieze*, *Artforum*, and *Magenta*, among others. She lives and works in Toronto.